



KENNEDY CATHOLIC PREPARATORY SCHOOL

A.P. English Language and Composition

Summer 2026 Assignments

Please purchase and read both of these books:

- **Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell**
- **Gilead by Marilynne Robinson**

Assignment One - Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell

“...Malcolm Gladwell poses a... provocative question in Outliers: why do some people succeed, living remarkably productive and impactful lives, while so many more never reach their potential? Challenging our cherished belief of the "self-made man," he makes the democratic assertion that superstars don't arise out of nowhere, propelled by genius and talent: "They are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot." Examining the lives of outliers from Mozart to Bill Gates, he builds a convincing case for how successful people rise on a tide of advantages, "some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky." ~ Mari Malcolm

Read Outliers

A. As you read, concentrate on Gladwell's definition of success. Notice how he uniquely defines and presents this abstract concept through his creative chapter titles, research, personal stories, and observations. You'll be surprised about how much you will learn from this original perspective on success.

B. Answer these guided reading questions: Answers must not be copied from the internet!

Introduction

1. What is the Roseto Mystery? What overarching idea is Gladwell establishing in his introduction?

Chapter One "The Matthew Effect":

2. Explain the author's viewpoint regarding "The Story of Success". Are personal qualities the sole reason one becomes an outlier? 3. What is the consequence of "prematurely writing people off as failures"?

Chapter Two "The 10,000-Hour Rule":

3. Explain the 10,000-Hour Rule.



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4. Consider the following: “Practice isn’t the thing you do once you’re good. It’s the thing you do that makes you good.” Explain how this philosophy was at work for Bill Joy, The Beatles, and Bill Gates.

Chapter Three “The Trouble with Geniuses, Part 1”:

5. Describe the difference between ‘divergence testing’ and ‘convergence testing’. Is one more significant than the other?

6. Gladwell states that communities and companies in American society “are convinced that those at the very top of the IQ scale have the greatest potential.” After reading the chapter, explain why you either agree or disagree with this statement.

Chapter Four “The Trouble with Geniuses, Part 2”:

7. Compare and contrast Langan and Oppenheimer.

8. What is the difference between “concerted cultivation” and “accomplishment of natural growth”?

Chapter Five “The Three Lessons of Joe Flom”:

9. Explain Gladwell’s statement as it relates to Joe Flom: “Buried in that setback was a golden opportunity.”

10. Consider the following quote: “Hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning.” Explain how this quote relates to the chapter.

Chapter Six “Harlan, Kentucky”:

11. Describe the “culture of honor” that exists in the Appalachian Mountains.

12. What are the “cultural legacies” as described in this chapter? Why are they significant to understand when dealing with people?

Chapter Seven “The Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes”:

13. Describe the significance of the “willingness to change” as it relates to Korean Air. What is Gladwell explaining about the importance of communication?

Chapter Eight “Rice Paddies and Math Tests”:

14. After reading this section of the book, have your opinions changed about math classes and math ability? Explain why or why not.

15. Describe the connection between the “10,000-Hour Rule” and the wet-rice farmers in Asia.

Chapter Nine “Marita’s Bargain”:

16. Describe the significance of summer vacation as it relates to different groups of students. Why is this significant? Epilogue “A Jamaican Story”:

17. What does Gladwell mean when he states, “The outlier in the end is not an outlier at all.”

18. Explain what Gladwell means when he states, “That is the story of my mother’s path to success – and it isn’t true.”



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C. Compose a three paragraph Essay (Between 500 and 750 words only).

Your essay will be used to assess your writing and ability to synthesize reading material. Write an essay that defends, or challenges, or ***qualifies** (see note at the end of this document) Gladwell's assertion that "if you work hard enough and assert yourself, and use your mind and imagination, you can shape the world to your desires" (Gladwell, 151).

- Present your ideas clearly and with organization following
- Use facts, examples, personal experience, and connections from your reading to support your claim (do you or don't you agree with Gladwell's assertion?). I am challenging you to think deeply about your readings
- Be sure to make specific connections to Gladwell and any other sources you may include in your argument. Cite both internally and on a works cited page any information you use from Gladwell or any other source- otherwise it is plagiarism.

Assignment Two – Gilead by Marilynne Robinson

Read Gilead

In the opening paragraph of Gilead, the narrator John Ames says, "I told you last night that I might be gone sometime." In this way the novel may set itself up as a reflection on mortality and a ***preparation for a good death***. In that same opening paragraph, John Ames also says "there are many ways to ***live a good life***." In this way, a vision (or visions) of the good life may begin to emerge from Gilead.

Compose a Three or Four Paragraph Essay (750 -800 words or slightly longer)

Discuss the two thematic elements that are italicized and placed in bold and in blue just above.

Include the following in your discussion:

1. Answer the question: how are each of these two themes developed through the novel? For instance, for one of those themes, you might answer the question: what seem to be some good ways, according to the novel, of preparing for death and thinking about one's own mortality? That's one theme. For the other theme, you might answer the question: what, according to the novel, are ways of living a good life? By the way, do the answers to these two questions overlap or coincide with one another in some ways? If so, explain how the novel suggests that they do.
2. Include in your discussion four quotes from the second half of the novel (after page 70 or so), and indicate how each quote reflects the development of a corresponding



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thematic element (two quotes for each theme).

3. Be sure to indicate what insights or ideas occur to the narrator regarding each thematic element. For instance, once again, along with good quotes, explain what are some ways of living a good life or of dying well, according to the narrator, and why. Compose your answer as a three or four paragraph essay. How you structure your three or four paragraphs is your choice. Build the essay in the best way you think is possible.

FOR BOTH ESSAYS:

- Both essays must be submitted via CANVAS only. You will not be able to upload to CANVAS until the beginning of the school year. However, you should complete your essays, save them, and then as soon as CANVAS opens, you may upload.

- essays should be typed and double-spaced

- **DO NOT PLAGARIZE: do your own good work**

***QUALIFY** means to limit the strength or meaning of a statement. Example:

“I'd like to *qualify* my criticisms of the college's shortcomings, by adding that students are very happy to be there and the teaching is very high caliber.”

These essays are due by **Friday, September 11th, 2026 by 3pm**. On **Wednesday and Thursday, September 16th and 17th**, you will have multiple choice tests on each of the books.

Questions:

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Mr. Spelman:

wspelman@kennedycatholic.org

ENJOY THE SUMMER! STAY SAFE AND WELL